

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
“Living in Ordinary Time: Re-Gifting”  
The Rev. Dr. John Judson  
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Psalm 107; Luke 12:13-21

So, how many of you here this morning ever had a piggy bank, even if it was not shaped like a pig? I had been thinking about piggy banks this week, for a reason that will become clear in a moment and so I asked my father if he had had one. Yes, he said, it was a small metal box. In the top was a slot for the coins. But that was about all that he could remember. Chances are, that growing up during the depression, his parents had given it to him to teach him the value of saving. Well if that was their purpose then it worked. My parents, like many of you, made saving an almost religious-routine part of their lives. They saved for cars...always paying cash. They saved to pay for my, and my brothers college educations...savings bonds. They saved for retirement. And in the process they passed that ethic on to their children and grandchildren. Which brings me to my second question, how many of you save? Great, that says that we all value saving when and how we can. Which raises the point...why does Jesus seem so opposed to saving in this morning's story.

To be sure that we are all on the same page...let's recap. Jesus is out teaching. A man comes up to him and wants Jesus to insure that the man receives his fair share of his parents' inheritance from his brother. A fair share is that to which he is legally entitled. We would think that Jesus would get the brothers together and help them work this out. Yet he doesn't. And in fact he not only doesn't intervene but he tells a story about a farmer who saves. The story goes like this. A farmer has a bumper crop. Rather than waste it betting at the chariot races in Capernaum, he decides to save. He hires a contractor; builds a bigger barn; stores his grain and then relaxes. It is time to enjoy the sweat of his brow...something that the book of Ecclesiastes says that he ought to do. As soon as he does so though, God shows up in the story and says to the farmer, surprise, you are dead. And guess what! All of that stuff that you saved is going to someone else. Somehow this does not appear to jive with the lessons we have been taught about saving...especially for retirement. So what gives? The answer comes in a single word...re-gifting. Let me explain.

When Cindy and I got married, everyone knew that we were headed off to seminary and that I was going to become a minister. They also knew that if there is one thing that all ministers do, it is to go to potluck suppers. They also knew that the one thing people who go to potluck suppers need is casserole dishes. What that meant was that when Cindy and I began to open all of our wedding presents, it seemed as if every other one was a casserole dish. Cindy estimates that we received between twenty-five and thirty casserole dishes. We had several choices. We could return some of them. We could save them all for that one potluck dinner where we needed to make twenty-five or thirty dishes. Or, we could re-gift them. For those of you unfamiliar with re-gifting, it is the process of taking what you have been given, usually in excess of what you need and you give it away to other people, which is what we did. I would guess that we were covered for wedding gifts for about ten or

twenty years. I realize that some of you may think that we were cheap...but no...we were actually demonstrating two profound Biblical principles, which are: everything that we have in life is a gift and our task is to give away to others from our excess.

The first Biblical principle is that everything we are and everything we have is a gift from God. It is a gift because we didn't create our bodies, our intellects, the rain, the earth or even the seeds that grow into what we eat. Those are all gifts. I realize that unlike the birds of the air and beasts of the field we have to work for a living. We have to take what God gives us and transform it into something useful. But still, what we do is manipulate...not create, thus it is gift. The second great biblical principle is that since these are all gifts, we are to re-gift the excess of what we have been gifted. We see this in the Torah where God's people are commanded to not harvest to the edge of their fields but to leave the excess for those who are in need. This second principle tells us that on a regular basis we are to share what we have with widows, orphans, the poor and the stranger. There is even something called the year of Jubilee in which all debts are forgiven so that no one finds themselves forever in debt. We are to re-gift the excess of what we have.

This is what is at the heart of Jesus' story about the farmer. The farmer thinks that he has created his bounty and he believes therefore that the excess is his, therefore he does not need to re-gift. We know this because Jesus carefully crafts the story. Jesus begins by making it clear that the land produced abundantly...not the farmer. Thus what was produced was a gift from God. The farmer misses this as we can see in his use of "I" and "my" in verses 17 and 18. *"And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' 18 Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.'" Thus the farmer is not criticized for saving. He is criticized for ignoring the two great Biblical themes, namely that all is gift and we are to re-gift. He assumes that the gifts of God that have come his way, the earth, the rains and the crops, are his and his alone and therefore do not need to be re-gifted. They do not need to be shared with those around him who are hungry and struggling for food.*

Re-gifting - this is what we are called to do. And this is what we, meaning the Kenya mission team, will be doing over the next two weeks. We will be sharing with a congregation and a community in Kenya, some of the gifts that we as a church community have been given...by you and by us. We have been given gifts from the Vision Fund, First Foundation, individual donors and we are using our own funds as well to participate in this endeavor as we help to build a church and school. But we are not the only one's re-gifting. The church members in Kenya have re-gifted sacrificially to pay their portion of the construction. The community where we will build the school has re-gifted a portion of the cost of construction. And in so doing we are all re-gifting for generations to come; generations of children who will learn; generations of worshippers whose lives will be changed by their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Re-gifting - it is what we are supposed to do. So here is my challenge for you for the coming week, to ask yourselves, how am I re-gifting from the abundance of gifts that God has given me; re-gifting so that this world looks more and more like the world God desires it to be?